

Christy Graser

Bio: I've spent most of my life with some attachment to nature and the outdoors. I knew I wanted to teach and so I started off getting my degree in early education and was unsatisfied with the program. By random chance I found my way into the Geography and Earth science field and found something I enjoyed and earned my BS. To graduate I was required to complete an internship and found that I could teach about environmental education as an actual job and get paid for it. I started out in Colorado and fell in love with the work. Over the last 20 years I worked at a community-based non-profit, a privately funded conservation foundation and then at a metro-park (like a park district) before making my way back to Illinois. Over my career, I have earned my Certified Interpretive Guide(CIG), National Geography Certified Educator, and Certified Park and Recreation Professional(CPRP) certificates to strengthen my background in creating and writing curriculum.

How did your career in the parks & recreation industry begin?

By accident! I remember participating in various programming throughout my childhood by way of our town's park district. Eventually, life brought me to the Fox Valley area, and I learned of an opportunity for a part-time position at Red Oak Nature Center – and I've been here ever since.

Describe the main responsibilities of your role:

My main responsibilities include the creation and development of educational programs for school field trips, family programs, summer camps and more. I network with teachers and curriculum coordinators to identify opportunities for them to come to Red Oak for field trips or for staff to go into the schools. I plan our yearly calendars with seasonal events and activities for all ages and encourage families to book birthday parties, scout outings and additional options to get them into nature and learn about the world found right outside their doors.

What do you enjoy most about working for the Fox Valley Park District?

The community impact. I love creating programs that bring people outside and into nature to create a stronger bond with their environment. We're consistently engaging with diverse groups and seeing firsthand how programs enrich lives, inspire learning, and build a sense of community. The variety in daily tasks and opportunities to innovate or introduce new experiences—like camps and field trips—makes the work dynamic and meaningful. Plus, the chance to work outdoors and with kids of all ages parallels with my personal goals.

What traits do you feel lend well to a career in parks & recreation?

A career in parks and rec needs a mix of skills that would include **effective communication** so you can reach out to a variety of ages and diverse groups; **flexibility** to adapt to changing situations, such as weather challenges or participant needs;; and **teamwork/leadership** to collaborate on cross-departmental projects.